

New Haven Public Schools

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ON PROVISIONS IN SB 24

Senator Stillman, Rep. Fleischmann, members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony to your committee on certain provisions in SB 24.

We applaud this year's focus on education by Governor Dannel P. Malloy and the General Assembly. I would like to provide some background and highlights on the changes we have been making in New Haven, and target where additional funds can help us expand our measures to close the achievement gap.

Background on New Haven's Efforts

New Haven is a city and district with consistent investments in our schools. Nearly 85% of New Haven's 20,000 students enjoy new and renovated schools, with outstanding learning spaces and highly efficient physical plants - we have some of the most beautiful school buildings in the country, thanks to our strategic partnership with the State of Connecticut. And inside those buildings, before we started School Reform, New Haven was recognized around the state and the nation for the strength of its curriculum and data systems, the application of the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI), and the implementation of student wellness and school food programs.

Building on these foundations of strong curriculum, state-of-the-art energy efficient buildings, an emphasis on social-emotional learning, and a commitment to the needs of every student from early childhood through high school, three years ago we launched our School Change initiative, with three goals:

- Eliminate the achievement gap with the rest of the state,
- Cut the dropout rate in half, and
- Ensure that every student has the academic ability and the financial resources to be successful in college or some other post high school education.

Looking back, we have accomplished much, both in implementing changed practices and policy in the school system, and more importantly in better results for students. Looking forward, though, we have much further to go - in maintaining the hard work, in continuing to have frank and hard conversations with each other, in continuing to invest on behalf of our students, our teachers, and our principals, and in ensuring that every student in New Haven is afforded the same opportunities in college and life as students everywhere in the state, nation, and world.

New Haven Public Schools

A lot has happened in the school district in the last three years, and we are all proud that we are delivering on what we set out to do. Our School Change strategy includes three parts.

- *First, Portfolio:* To recognize that every school is different, and has its own unique path to success, the district has put out school-based budgets, tiered all its schools (into one (1) of three (3) tiers), and begun to encourage schools to vary their approaches to educating students. Over the last two (2) years, the district re-organized and re-staffed five (5) of the lowest performing schools, including partnering with outside providers in two (2) cases – we will do what it takes and work with whoever can help to improve all schools for our students.
- *Second, Talent:* The district built and delivered on a national model Administrator and Teacher Evaluation and Development, resulting in giving the vast majority of teachers stronger coaching and feedback from their managers, and resulting in separation from a small but significant numbers of administrators and teachers who were not delivering for students, despite support. We are working to build talent in our classrooms and schools by managing our staff as collaborative, empowered, and accountable professionals. In fact, Nicholas D. Kristof, a *New York Times* columnist, just last week opined about New Haven's model collaboration with our teachers union (attached). The next day, parts of our contract provided the basis for New York City's new agreement with its teachers.
- *Third, Community:* We launched the Promise College scholarship and preparation program, a massive financial, programmatic, and community commitment to our students' long-term success. We also launched the Boost program with the United Way, beginning to marshal the strengths of New Haven non-profit community, focusing on wraparound services and supports for students in four (4) domains: physical health and wellness; social, emotional and behavioral health; student engagement and extended learning opportunities; and family support and engagement. We work with Dr. James Comer and utilize positive behavioral support services programs. We are aligning the work of schools with that of community resources and parents, to ensure that each child can come to school each day ready and available to learn.

Much of what we see in the Governor's education bill mirrors the emerging best practices of New Haven, whether in the emphasis on professional development, teacher and principal evaluation, the embrace of school turnaround efforts, the emphasis on Pre-K and wraparound services, all to ensure that students are ready to learn in the classroom. We are proud that we have been able to point a way for the State in education, and we believe that our path is a good one for the State to be following. These strategies are yielding concrete evidence of good education results for our students. Parents, teachers, and students have told us the climate is improving in 37 of our 39 schools, including higher academic expectations, more communication, collaboration, and engagement, and greater safety and respect. Last year, we saw strong gains on CMT and CAPT, meeting our first-year goals and taking a solid step in closing the gap with the rest of the state. And recently, the district released preliminary data on last year's graduation statistics – the graduation rate went up 1.8% last year alone, and many more of our underclassmen in high school are on track to graduate.

New Haven's Funding Situation

Our fiscal support from the City and the State has remained flat in the last four (4) years, while our costs, investments and commitment to our students have increased. We were able to utilize stimulus funds and one time or short term grant funds to help fill the gap. In New Haven, as elsewhere, the largest portions of our budget and budget increase continue to relate to fixed costs such as negotiated employee salaries, medical benefits, transportation, special education and utilities. Aggressive efforts continue to be employed in order reduce these fixed costs, where possible, through negotiations with collective bargaining units, expansion of the comprehensive high efficiency energy

New Haven Public Schools

program, increased reimbursement through the universal free breakfast and lunch program, and careful evaluation of programs and redistribution of staff and resources in order to maximize productivity while minimizing added costs. Cost-effective and innovative operations continue to be a priority for the district, from healthy food to effective transportation to tight school security. What is happening in New Haven is groundbreaking and game changing!

Given the needs of our schools and students, the sustained gains made by the Board of Education and the necessity for fiscal stability, the time has come for an increase in fiscal support for education efforts in New Haven, to build off of the strong foundation that has been laid and to continue to press forward to meet our goals.

We support the proposed increases in state support for ECS and for interdistrict magnet schools in SB 24. We support the long overdue steps being taken to move closer to fully funding ECS and other funding streams, and that will help. The additional funds that will accrue to New Haven will cover some – but not all – of the increases we face due to collective bargaining increases and other inflationary costs.

However, the increases in our base funding will not cover the additional costs of our School Change Initiative, whether those involve additional early reading intervention for grades K-3, extended school day and school year programming, extended work with teachers and principals, or expanded wraparound services. Therefore, we support the proposed additional funding for conditional funding, or alliance, districts, for the Commissioner's Network, and for talent development. We appreciate the recognition for these needs. The funds are a start but cannot meet all the needs of New Haven or other school districts in closing the achievement gap. And the outside grants we have obtained for our School Change Initiative – whether for innovative leadership programs or other services – help, but they too cannot close the funding gap.

The interventions we have in place now – interventions with clear evidence of success in the district's reading scores over time – have been reduced and are under threat of significant additional reductions, given the loss of ARRA funds and flat funding. We have had to cut tutors' hours this year, and they started later in the school year than they should have, so we are concerned about the K-2 consequences. We also have not been able to sustain or expand our interventions in grades 6-12, which have been so helpful to students to our older students who do not yet have the reading skills they need to succeed in high school and after high school.

For curricular improvements, we have been rewriting our curriculum to match the common core, but our ability to purchase such materials as Math in Focus and Plugged-In for grades 3-5 is quite limited without additional funds. We also have had to reduce how much we spend on curriculum development. This fiscal year we have cut our spending for all the contents from \$100,000 to \$55,000. We have been able to keep most of our literacy and math coaches because of Title IIA funding and magnet funding but Title IIA is cut each year. Our library media specialists are also reduced in number.

Our principals and assistant principals are typically called on to manage 20 to 25 teachers. According to literature and best practices, the ideal ratio, including in high performing charter schools, should be closer to 1 to 10 or 1 to 12. Our social workers and psychologists are spread between schools, splitting the days of the week when there are students who may need them on any day of the week. Our students have fewer options for summer employment and activity. And these are challenges we must overcome if we are to reach our goals for our students.

New Haven Public Schools

We have been doing more with less but as we continue with our School Change Initiative we know that we need more funding in order to achieve more. Frankly, it should be millions more (the loss of stimulus funding alone means we are \$10 million below where we were), and it should be flexible, so that we can refocus our efforts in various schools on an as-needed basis. We are happy to be held accountable for any additional dollars, as we have the data to show how effective the funding and our interventions are.

We believe we are on the right track. The meaningful collaborations with the New Haven Federation of Teachers, School Administrators Association, custodians and other staff, parents, the business community, nonprofits and other community leaders have created a rich environment for exponential growth not only for our students but also for our educators. New Haven's School Change Initiative has strengthened pride in our schools and drawn the support of the community to ensure our students succeed. Additional support will take us closer to the finish line so that our students will have positive choices for their futures and be productive members of our workforce. Thank you.

New Haven Public Schools

Highlights of New Haven Public Schools:

Through the efforts of its teachers and staff, the school system can report significant highlights, as follows:

- Sustained gains in State mastery test scores across the board at all levels, including many double digit increases at many schools over the last few years that collectively put the district on-track with its goals.;
- By the end of 2011-12, graduation rates in the City high schools had increased by 1.8% and the percentage of underclassmen on track to graduate increased by 9.2%;
- 11 New Haven Public Schools made either Safe Harbor or Annual Yearly Progress last year, reflecting unprecedented improvement in test scores under Connecticut's No Child Left Behind regime;
- Continued implementation of significant school improvement efforts, including the rehiring of staff at 5 schools – 2 in partnership with outside providers – and transformation efforts in another 3 schools;
- Continued implementation of the school learning climate surveys, provided to parents, teachers, staff and students in 6th grade and up, which in 2010-11 showed overall improvement in 37 of 39 schools. The data from those surveys, including aggregate responses for all schools to each question, is available on the district website;
- Expansion of the Plugged In to Reading, a highly successful new Middle School literacy program that supports the revised middle school curriculum;
- Continued development of a nationally recognized School Food Program, which has continued to add healthy menu choices for children, increased student participation in meals and resulting federal reimbursements, and resulted in the awards of numerous grants and recognitions related to the availability of fresh fruits and vegetable and breakfast programs and the overall efforts to increase healthy eating and awareness and decreasing obesity in New Haven Public Schools. The Food Service Program has worked directly with the White House to assist in designing the Chef's Move to School Campaign and other aspects of the First Lady's "Let's Move" campaign. These efforts and many others by the Food Service staff have served to extend the classroom to the cafeteria and to ensure that all students are offered healthy meals throughout the year and are more cognizant of the healthy choices that they can make with respect to food and nutrition;
- Continued recognition for New Haven Public Schools implementation of the Connecticut Accountability for Learning Initiative (CALI), including national profiles of district data team work and chapter on COOP High School in a Leadership and Learning Center book;
- Implementation of heightened rigor and support for the most expansive Districtwide Pre-K program in the State (New Haven is the largest school-based pre-school provider in Connecticut);
- Expansion in use of the School Net computer system which allows for school, grade and student specific performance tracking and data driven benchmarks and other strategies designed to increase student achievement and the successful bidding and selection of a new Student information system, Power Schools, to replace our legacy student information system, work seamlessly with School Net and create a state-of-the-art comprehensive student information with Parent portals and other features which will increase efficiency, accountability and information sharing while reducing costs;
- State designation as the #1 Wellness Policy which reflects the Physical Activity and Wellness programs, and a variety of healthy education initiatives that support the documented connection between positive physical and mental health and student achievement;
- Successful application and leveraging of available program dollars through the ERATE program to maximize available federal resources to provide state of the art computer, phones and internet capability across the district;

New Haven Public Schools

- Successful transition to an on-line work order system for facilities repairs which has led to increased efficiency, reduction in outsourced repair costs, and identifiable measures of control and performance related to maintenance issues and Capital Projects;
- Continuation and expansion of Centralized Energy Conservation Programs which have reduced kbtus and energy costs across the district in each of the last four years even though the total square footage has increased by hundreds of thousands of square feet;
- The school construction program has resulted in 35 new and renovated schools opened since 1998 with two more in construction and one more in planning and design; they contribute to an improved learning environment, as noted in various reports. Nearly 17,000 students in New Haven Public Schools enjoy new and renovated schools which have both state-of-the-art learning spaces and Energy Star “target finders” efficiency levels;
- Aggressive negotiation of Collective Bargaining Agreements and work in collaboration with the City of New Haven in order to combat increased health care costs through medical plan redesign (part of the School Administrators Association Settlement), Costly Work Rule/Privatization Concessions and negotiated wage freezes; and
- Implementation of Innovation Based Budgeting strategies in conjunction with the City of New Haven in an effort to promote efficiencies and realize revenue potential through programs including but not limited to site based budgeting, energy efficiency and preventative maintenance programs, print/document management programs and workflow technology designed to eliminate waste and increase workflow efficiency, targeted privatization and other measures.

For the upcoming year the Board will continue to build off of the gains noted above. The challenges to urban education remain significant and much more work needs to be done. In order to continue the steady gains that have been achieved over the last few years we will continue to focus on the following:

- Tiering of all New Haven Public Schools and transformational planning for all schools, designed to promote aggressive growth consistent with the New Haven School Change goals;
- Expand the successfully implemented new evaluation and coaching systems for Teachers, Principals, and Central Office employees, ensuring that evaluation and coaching is professional, constructive, and consequential;
- Continue strengthening leadership pipelines within the public schools, to ensure the strongest possible school principals and assistant principals, and creating a career trajectory for our strongest teachers;
- Continue the implementation and expansion of Promise and College Summit programs across the District which will serve to establish college as not only a goal for all students but a reality which all students can achieve;
- Expand the focus on career and technical education as a way to engage student interests and prepare all students for some form of post-graduation certification or credential, which is essential for economic and life success for our students;
- Coordination of next generation of School Surveys and Wellness Report Cards for all schools as the BOOST Program and Wraparound services are expanded;
- Investigate and create a “Parent University” program, to ensure that parents have the knowledge, skill and ability to support their students in school and at home;
- Implement the new national common core of standards, consistent with the leadership position on this issue that New Haven has already taken around the state and country;

New Haven Public Schools

- Expand successful implementation of new curriculum initiatives and literacy programs designed to utilize the data driven approach with school and district wide data teams;
- Expand and improve preschool initiatives through data driven strategies and review designed to push for academic mastery in the preschool and kindergarten years;
- Expand schools of choice for students of the New Haven Public Schools by enhancing program design, registration outreach, and expanding marketing efforts;
- Continue to focus on stakeholder engagement, parental involvement, and partnerships within the community through a redesigned website designed to increase access to information and services, professional development of staff and workshops for parents and students; and
- Strengthen truancy initiative and refocus partnerships with Dr. James Comer and the New Haven Police Department in order to effectively address social and emotional needs of students and to continue to create a safe and nurturing learning environment while effectively reducing truancy rates and dropout rates and increasing graduation rates.

New Haven Public Schools

The New York Times

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The New Haven Experiment

By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

NEW HAVEN

I lost patience with teachers' unions when union officials in New York City defended a teacher who had passed out in class, reeking of alcohol, with even the principal unable to rouse her.

Not to mention when union officials in Los Angeles helped a teacher keep his job after he allegedly mocked a student who had tried to commit suicide, suggesting that the boy slash his wrists more deeply the next time.

In many cities, teachers' unions ensured no one was removed for mere incompetence. If a teacher stole or abused a student, yes, but school boards didn't even try to remove teachers who couldn't teach.

"Before, you had to go smack the mayor in order to get fired," Reggie Mayo, the schools superintendent here in New Haven, told me.

That's what makes an experiment under way here so jaw-dropping. New Haven has arguably become ground zero for school reform in America because it is transforming the system with the full cooperation of the union.

One of America's greatest challenges in the coming years will be to turn around troubled schools, especially in inner cities. It's the civil rights issue of our age, and teachers' unions have mostly been an exasperating obstacle.

Yet reformers like myself face a conundrum. Teachers' unions are here to stay, and the only way to achieve systematic improvement is with their buy-in. Moreover, the United States critically needs to attract talented young people into teaching. And that's less likely when we're whacking teachers' unions in ways that leave many teachers feeling insulted and demoralized.

The breakthrough experiment in New Haven offers a glimpse of an education future that is less rancorous. It's a tribute to the savvy of Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers and as shrewd a union leader as any I've seen. She realized that the unions were alienating their allies, and she is trying to change the narrative.

New Haven may be home to Yale University, but this is a gritty, low-income school district in which four out of five kids qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Eighty-four percent of students are black or Hispanic, and graduation rates have been low.

New Haven Public Schools

A couple of years ago, the school district reached a revolutionary contract with teachers. Pay and benefits would rise, but teachers would embrace reform — including sacrificing job security. With a stronger evaluation system, tenure no longer mattered and weak teachers could be pushed out.

Roughly half of a teacher's evaluation would depend on the performance of his or her students — including on standardized tests and other measures of learning.

Teachers were protected by a transparent process, and by accountability for principals. But if outside evaluators agreed with administrators that a teacher was failing, the teacher would be out at the end of the school year.

Last year, the school district pushed out 34 teachers, about 2 percent of the total in the district. The union not only didn't object, but acknowledged that many of them didn't really belong in the classroom.

"We all use the same litmus test: Would we want our kid in that room?" says David Cicarella, president of the New Haven Federation of Teachers, the local union. "We all recognize that we need to do something. Tenured teachers who are ineffective — that is an issue. We want to do something about it. But it's not fair either to blame all teachers."

Cicarella says that teachers accept that the world has changed. Accountability and feedback are welcome if they are fair, he says, adding: "It's not O.K. any more to spray and pray."

So far this year, administrators have warned about 50 more teachers that their jobs are in jeopardy because of weak teaching. That's out of 1,800 teachers in the district.

Mayor John DeStefano Jr. of New Haven says that the breakthrough isn't so much that poor teachers are being eased out, but that feedback is making everyone perform better — principals included. "Most everybody picked up their game in the district," he said.

It'll take years to verify that students themselves are benefiting, but it's striking that teachers and administrators alike seem happy with the new system. They even say nice things about each other. In many tough school districts, teachers are demoralized and wilted; that feels less true in New Haven.

The New Haven model still doesn't go as far as I would like, but it does represent enormous progress. And it's a glimpse of a world in which "school reform" is an agenda and not just a term that sets off a brawl.

If the American Federation of Teachers continues down this path, I'll revisit my criticisms of teachers' unions. Maybe even give them a hug for daring to become part of the solution.

I invite you to visit my blog, On the Ground. Please also join me on Facebook and Google+, watch my YouTube videos and follow me on Twitter.